

City of Newton
Mayor's Crime Prevention Commission
Highlights of Meetings for Year Ended June 30, 2010

December 16, 2009

The Chair presented his first message since his appointment on December 9, 2009. He proposed to spend early 2010 time "talking about the ways and means we might go forward continue to distinguish ourselves as a meaningful part of this city's public safety establishment.

In a recent interview, incoming Mayor Setti Warren said "the City needs a new direction" (Boston Globe, December 12, 2009). That, therefore, would seem to be our challenge as well. Obviously, our part is a very small piece of the action so our job will simply be to do all the good we can in any way we can.

Though this was only our first meeting after the retirement of the last Chair, it was a good meeting since it opened a dialogue on a number of important "ideas" reported below.

Those present heard a:

- Call to work closely with the new Mayor, Setti Warren, and his administration's representatives. Accordingly, we will position ourselves to work closely with the new administration (once it has settled in) to discover its priorities and to recommend policies the Mayor might be interested in advancing. This Commission is, after all, a creation of the Mayor intended to serve him and his vision for the City.
- Sincere appeal to make our membership meaningful. It was observed that the CPC has no money (according to the most recent Treasurer's report - except for a dedicated project, fingerprinting), and we have no staff, like so many similar groups. Yet, we do have a choice and a voice!
- Discussion about who are we. The answer was simple. We are a group of concerned citizen volunteers who care about the City of Newton.
- Discussion about what we do. The answer was not so simple so the dialogue will be ongoing. The Chair suggested that we reconsider the first two words of our title – Crime Prevention. What do they mean? Perhaps, with a renewed emphasis upon prevention, we might begin to find a mission to which we can point with pride. Does that mean we should renew our focus on "ideas" for preventing crimes and/or other wrongful behaviors that should be a crime or even a mere violation of a city ordinance? Maybe so! These are interesting questions which can lead to even more interesting answers. It is a story that will unfold in time. When we have made more progress along these lines, we will also endeavor to update our Mission Statement.
- An array of "crime prevention" ideas for dialogue. In this regard, the mere mention of mission made us face the raw reality that we have little capacity to do anything by ourselves without funding, without staff and without members who have time for labor intensive assignments. From that discussion, it appeared that the best route would be to "partner" with other groups within the City. It was observed that there are many such groups who are quite active and with whom we might team up (by having our individual member volunteers serve as liaison persons) for crime prevention activities. Marc Epstein also mentioned the possibility of working with the Newton Rotary, a really exciting prospect.

- Thus, partnering seemed to be one new vision worthy of pursuit. After all, partnering may be less dollar-demanding and more work-sharing. Meaningful ideas, or issues for consideration, were considered. It was thought that, among these, there may be areas in which we might seek a leadership role. They were:
 - Hate Crimes – a partnering opportunity to work with the office of Congressman Barney Frank and the Newton Police Department (NPD). The Congressman has recently introduced new hate crimes legislation (H.R. 1913) passed by the House on October 8, 2009. George Cullen agreed to take the lead (as a legislative liaison) by calling Mr. Frank's Newton office and asking for a staff person to attend our next meeting. This is something we might do with the Newton Human Rights Commission.
 - Women's Issues - a partnering opportunity to work with the Women's Commission as well as NPD and begin discussions about domestic violence as well as how it can be prevented.
 - Elder Fraud – a partnering opportunity to work with the Newton Senior Center and the NPD to begin discussions about better educating the older population.
 - Youth Problems – a partnering opportunity to work with the Youth Commission and the NPD to begin discussions about youngsters who take drugs and lean toward underage drinking.
 - Unsafe Use of Cell Phones - a partnering opportunity to work with the Mayor's representatives to discover the administration's position and the evolving views of residents about talking on cell phones while driving and/or "texting" while driving.
 - Fingerprinting - Dave Winer has already taken steps to advance this cause, hopefully by Spring 2011. He reported how he raised \$1,500 available for use in the fingerprinting effort. Partnering with the Masons, it was suggested, who already have an active and well publicized program for fingerprinting children, might also be a workable idea. Their program is called the Childhood Identification Program (CHIPs). We might go where they go in Newton and/or invite them to join us for the "Touch-a-Truck" event at Newton South High School and/or at a table on the Oktoberfest lawn in Newton Centre. Either way, we might respectfully request the Police Auxiliary (who will be on site anyway) to chip in with any other members who may be available for part of a day.
- The Crime Report. Lt. Bruce Apotheker discussed statistics from the NPD Compstat Report. The most pertinent news was that recent robberies, burglaries, and motor vehicle breaks are down. It was also observed that even though the number of uniformed officers has dropped from 204 in 1983 to 138 in 2009, the police department performs admirably with a better trained and managed force.

February 17, 2010

We opened by bringing to the table a discussion of "hate crimes". Our Visitor who led the talk was Mr. Jon Hollander, from the Office of Congressman Barney Frank. Jon spoke about recently enacted "hate crimes" legislation (passing the House as HR 1913 and folded into HR 2467 the Defense Authorization Act) sponsored by Mr. Frank. He reported how the legislation extends the definition of "*violent*" hate crimes to include gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability.

This "hate crimes" legislation, he noted, was just one major bill in what Congressman Frank sees as an essential step-by-step strategy. Earlier this summer, he introduced the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which extended workforce protections. After these bills are passed, he plans to take on the repeal of the military's "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy. In a short period of time, Jon thus provided a most fascinating insight on issue movement within the inner workings of our U.S.

Congress. He also reported on how the new legislation would complement the laws already in force and being applied by the NPD.

Lt. Bruce Apotheker then spoke to the aggressive involvement of the NPD in “hate crimes” investigation. He reported about his graffiti cases as well as the high percentage of anti-Semitic incidents.

We then turned our attention to another public safety issue, so-called “distractive driving” while using hand-held cell phones. Our discussion was about both hand-held cell phones as well as the texting problem while driving. It was observed that:

(1) Inattention is a leading factor in many crashes, and cell phone use and texting are some of the most common driver distractions,

(2) Studies from the *Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, the University of Utah and Carnegie Mellon* have indicated all cell phone use is excessively distracting (Indeed, more than one member observed that driving by itself is distracting), and

(3) The City of Newton has historically been at the top of all lists of safest cities in the United States.

Consequently, members felt that our City should join with so many other local and national constituencies on this initiative by sending a message to all drivers. Everyone spoke about whether any driver should be allowed to use hand-held cell phones or other electronic devices while driving within City limits.

Six (6) states (California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and Washington), the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands prohibit all drivers from talking on handheld cell phones while driving. With the exception of Washington State, these laws are all primary enforcement, which means an officer may ticket a driver for using a hand-held cell phone while driving without any other traffic offense taking place. (Source: *Governors’ Highway Safety Association Issue Brief: Cell Phones and Distracted Driving*.)

After full discussion it was “unanimously” agreed, therefore, by all Commission members present, that a complete ban was the right thing to do for City of Newton public safety. Accordingly, our Commission’s position will be to support a ban on all non-emergency hand-held cell phone use while driving (with the obvious exception of emergency use by Police and other emergency vehicles). (After the meeting, the Chair learned from State Representative Ruth Balser that the Massachusetts House had already passed a limited ban on hand-held use and a complete ban on texting. The bill was now before the Massachusetts Senate. He also learned that the matter was also under active discussion by the City of Newton / Board of Aldermen.)

The practical difficulty inherent in enforcing a ban on “texting and driving” will remain as an open issue for some time. This is one infraction that may be hard to prove!

March 17, 2010

We discussed the our recent contact with the Youth Commission. Available for further discussion were:

(1) A “draft” of a *Mission Statement*, since we should certainly try to look as good as we can be, and

(2) A copy of the Chair's *Newton South High School (NSHS)* letter, dated February 8, 2010. It tells a fascinating story of a racial incident and how our Commission participated in its resolution, and

Members present agreed unanimously to adopt the Mission Statement. It differs from the draft considered last month in that the statement called "Women's Issues" is now called "Domestic Violence", which can apply to women and/or men.

April 21, 2010

Special guests were Ellen Manning, Newton Community Service Center, 429 Cherry Street, Newton, around the corner from the NPD Headquarters. Ms. Manning, who oversees the Teen Center, talked about teenager abuse of over-the counter medicines.

The Chair reported that he learned from a City Hall official who advised us that our Commission will likely be "exempted" from the need to take the Ethics Test for the next two years. Apparently, it is an ongoing process so we likely be required to revisit the issue.

In reviewing the new Mission Statement, it was noted that being proactive against "bullying" is in the language. Unfortunately, it is now also highly visible on the landscape. Recent tragic events (in neighboring places) call for us to accelerate our efforts to work collaboratively with stakeholders in our own City. The common goal is, of course, to do whatever we can to prevent this threat to public safety. I look forward to a sharing your ideas when we meet. Clearly, the entire community will benefit by renewed attention upon what I have tentatively called a 3 Point Program - Prevention, Reporting and Crisis Intervention. Early thinking along these lines is that we, as a community, should consider fixing grown-up responsibility for making it very "uncool" to be a bully!

May 19, 2010

A special guest was Kim Coney, NPD Domestic Violence Officer. She talked about the nature and extent of domestic violence in the City. Our job will be to figure out how we can help.

Our involvement with this public safety issue is mandated by our Mission Statement, which speaks of "our pledge to be proactive in support of activities that center on learning and teaching others about violence against women." We are also charged with supporting "appropriate measures in the field of education to modify bad patterns of conduct among some men and women."

The Chair also presented a Resolution about DXM and teens. It was unanimously agreed too by all present. The thought that we should take a position had come into focus as we listened at our last meeting to a dramatic story (about a near death teen) and a heartfelt presentation by Ellen Manning, who oversees Newton's Teen center.

June 16, 2010

A special guest was Richard Catrambone, Intervention Prevention Counselor at Newton South High School (NSHS). Richard talked to us about that part of our Mission Statement that deals with youthful offenders in the City. He brilliantly leads the series of NSHS Restorative Justice Circles that have enjoyed great success as a remedy for bad behavior and its aftermath. We were reminded that our Mission Statement reads, in part, as follows:

"Youthful Offenders – The Commission is pledged to be proactive in support of programs designed to prevent and remedy youthful bad behavior. It will work with the Youth Commission and the Newton Public Schools to advocate formal activities such as

Restorative Justice (healing). Offensive acts which invite some form of healing may involve physical assault, damage to property, bullying, harassment, verbal abuse/insults, offensive graffiti and/or written messages (hate mail). Restorative justice emphasizes repairing the harm. Of course, it is not a substitute for appropriate police and prosecutorial activity when warranted. It is simply something different. The purpose is to heal through cooperative processes, which include all stakeholders. When victims, offenders and community members meet, the results can be transformational. Such programs are characterized by creating opportunities to collectively discuss bad behavior and its aftermath. One way this is done is the "restorative circle" where all involved parties tell their side of the story respectfully in a structured format. The circle has assumed prominence as a preferred approach for working with children and youth at risk."

The meeting was adjourned for the summer months; and the Chair said he would work with NPD Lt. Apotheker to provide an agenda for the next meeting in September 2010.